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AN ESSAY

ON

THE PASTORAL OFFICE,

AS

EXEMPLIFIED IN THE ECONOMY OF THE METHODIST
EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

By REV. J. H. WYTHES, M.D.,

OF THE PHILADELPHIA CONFERENCE.

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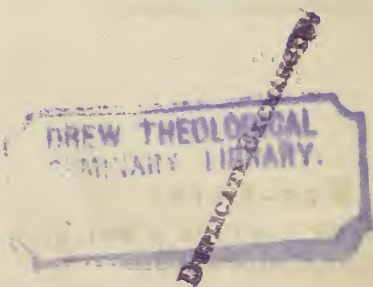
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P R E F A C E.

MOST of the secessions from the communion of the Methodist Episcopal Church have been owing to a diversity of opinion or a want of information respecting the extent of authority claimed by the itinerant ministry, and the recent discussion of the question of lay delegation has revived the subject and led to controversies which might have proved deleterious to the Church.

The polity of the Church has never lacked defenders, some of whom yet live to bless us with their counsels, while others have passed away; yet as most of their productions were penned in the midst of controversy, and as none of them have confined their essays to the authority and extent of the Pastoral Office, the writer deems that a condensed view of the subject, under appropriate heads of discourse, may not be unacceptable, or without its use.

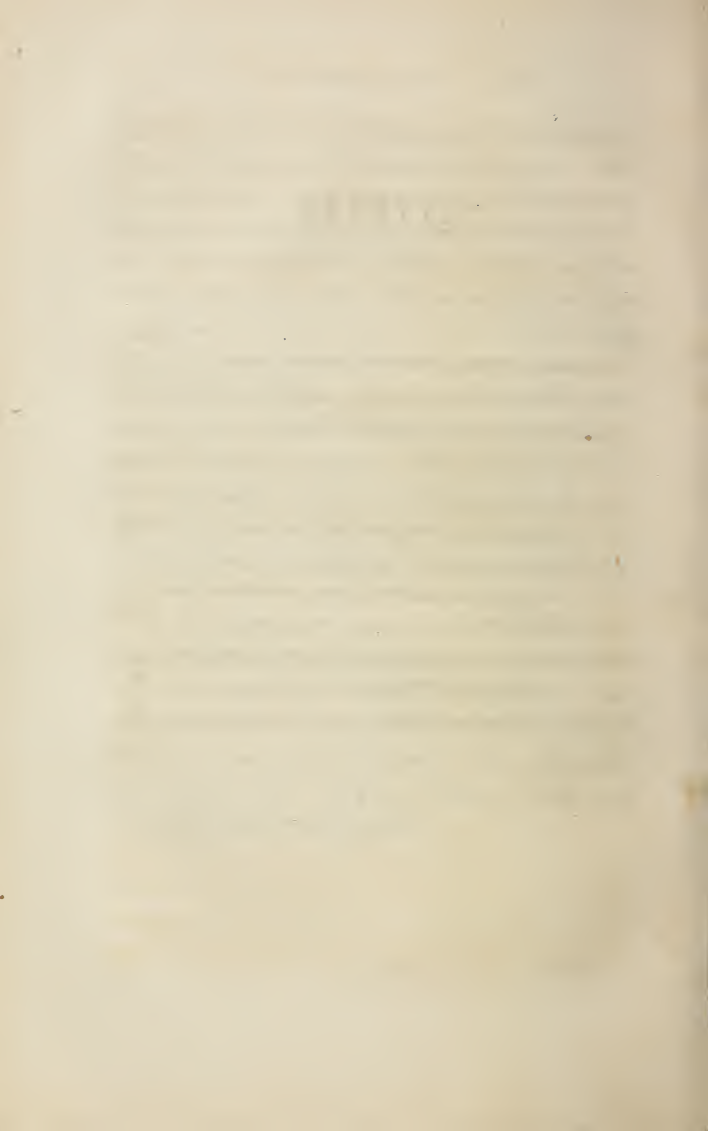
The subject might have been readily extended to a volume of more respectable size; but conciseness

has been preferred to verbiage, and it is hoped that what is lacking in size is made up in matter. Two principles have been kept steadily in view during the progress of this little work—the Scriptural authority of the pastors of the Church, and the essential rights of the membership. The writer believes these principles to be harmonized in the economy of the Church of his choice, and this harmony he has endeavoured to exhibit. If he has failed, it has been from want of ability in himself, rather than from a want of truth in his subject. If he shall have proved at all successful, he will be satisfied with the consciousness that he has contributed his mite to the advancement of a cause which lies nearer to his heart than all the world besides.

In committing this essay to his brethren, the writer would suggest the propriety of the Psalmist's beautiful sentiments: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces!"

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THE PASTORAL OFFICE.

CHAPTER I.

THE PASTORAL OFFICE OF DIVINE RIGHT.

Not a matter of expediency—Church under law to Christ—
Scriptural authority for the ministerial office—Views of theologians—Views of Churches.

It is a favourite doctrine with the generality of the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, as well as many others, that no particular form of Church government is prescribed for the Church by divine authority; and, to a certain extent, this doctrine is true.

If, by *a particular form of Church government*, the peculiar relation of ministers, or individual Churches, with each other, be referred to; as, for instance, whether they shall be Independent, Pres-

byterial, or Episcopal, in their economy; or if it be meant, that the mode in which the great principles of the gospel should be carried into effect, in relation to Church fellowship between individual members, may be properly left to the judgment of each Church, then we have no fault to find with the doctrine alluded to: but if it is intended to assert, that it is a matter of expediency whether the Church has pastors or has not; or, that the nature and extent of pastoral duty is to be determined by conventional arrangement, then we beg leave to dissent from it altogether.

In a community in which the doctrine of the divine right of kings has been thoroughly exploded, the claim of such right for the pastors of the Church will, of course, be regarded with suspicion; and weak minds will be inclined to connect such a claim with the arrogant pretensions of the Papal priesthood during the dark ages. Yet these obvious disadvantages will not deter us from presenting what we believe to be the truth. We may remark here, however, that whatever evils the

Church may have suffered at the hands of an apostate priesthood, have grown out of the extent of their authority, rather than out of their claim of divine right. It is one thing to profess to be sent of God to preach the gospel, and quite another thing to claim dominion over the faith and consciences of men.

If the objects of Church fellowship were identical with the objects of national government, the arguments of republicanism might reasonably apply to this subject; but they are not so.

The Church is not a convention for the preservation of mutual rights, but an association of believers, in obedience to God's word; hence it cannot be *self-governed*, but is under law to Christ. Even the liberty of the Church to "ordain, change, or abolish rites and ceremonies," is a liberty allowed and controlled by the law of the gospel.

By the divine right of the pastoral office we mean, that it is the prerogative of the Divine Being to call men to the exercise of the gospel ministry; consequently, that

all gospel ministers profess to be moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon themselves this office: also, that the nature, extent, and limitations of the pastoral office are clearly exhibited in the New Testament, and are not left, therefore, to be determined by contract or expediency.

No attentive reader of the New Testament will hesitate to admit that Christ selected or ordained certain of his disciples to the special work of preaching or proclaiming his gospel. See Matt. x; Luke ix, 1-6; x, 1-17. Twelve of them were admitted into more intimate familiarity than the rest, and were distinguished by the name of *apostles*. These were regarded, after the ascension of Christ, as possessing chief authority among the disciples, being the principal witnesses of the resurrection of the Saviour, and being empowered, by divine inspiration, to establish the infant Church. Acts i, 15-26; vi, 2-6; 1 Cor. ix, 1; Gal. ii, 9.

It is also evident that the New Testament represents the whole gospel ministry as founded upon divine appointment. The

following passages are quoted in proof of this position :—

“The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.” Acts xiii, 2.

“Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Acts xx, 28.

“I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins,” &c. Acts xxvi, 16–18.

“How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?” &c. Rom. x, 14, 15.

“For Christ sent me to preach the gospel.” 1 Cor. i, 17.

“For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.” 1 Cor. i, 21.

“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?” 1 Cor. ii, 5.

“Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.” 1 Cor. ix, 14.

“God hath set some in the Church; first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles; then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.” 1 Cor. xii, 28.

“Our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit,” &c. 2 Cor. iii, 6.

“All things are of God, who hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation hath committed unto us the word of rec-

onciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." 2 Cor. v, 18-20.

"I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me, by the effectual working of his power," &c. Eph. iii, 7, &c.

"When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. . . . And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," &c. Eph. iv, 8, 11, 12, &c.

"I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God, which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God." Col. i, 25.

"As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts." 1 Thess. ii, 4.

"If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a

good minister of Jesus Christ," &c. 1 Tim. iv, 6.

"I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands." 2 Tim. i, 6.

"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." 2 Tim. ii, 1, 2.

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. . . . Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." 2 Tim. iv, 2, 5.

"For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee. . . . For a bishop must be blameless," &c. Tit. i, 5, 7.

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must

give account; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." Heb. xiii, 17.

From the tenor of these and similar passages, the conclusion is certain, that the New Testament regards the ministry of the gospel, not as a conventional arrangement, but as an office ordained of God, and designed to be permanent in the Christian Church.

Mr. Buck sums up the Scriptural argument as follows:—"That the gospel ministry is of divine origin, and intended to be kept up in the Church, will evidently appear, if we consider the promises, that in the last and best times of the New Testament dispensation, there would be an instituted and regular ministry in her, (Eph. iv, 8, 11; Tit. i, 5; 1 Pet. v; 1 Tim. i;) also, from the names of office peculiar to some members in the Church, and not common to all, (Eph. iv, 8, 11;) from the duties which are represented as reciprocally binding on ministers and people, (Heb. xiii, 7, 17; 1 Pet. v, 2-4;) from the promises of assistance which were given

to the first ministers of the new dispensation, (Matt. xxviii, 20;) and from the importance of a gospel ministry, which is represented in the Scripture as a very great blessing to them who enjoy it, and the removal of it as one of the greatest calamities which can befall any people. Rev. ii and iii."

Mr. R. Watson, in his "Theological Institutes," remarks, "that the power of admission into the Church, of reproof, of exhortation, and of excision from it, subject to various guards against abuses, is in the pastors of a Church. There are some who have adopted a different opinion, supposing that the power of administering the discipline of Christ must be conveyed by them to their ministers, and is to be wholly controlled by their suffrages; so that there is in these systems not a provision of counsel against possible errors in the exercise of authority; not a guard against human infirmity or viciousness; not a reservation of right to determine upon the fitness of the cases to which the laws of Christ are applied; but a claim of

co-administration as to these laws themselves, or rather an entire administration of them through the pastor, as a passive agent of their will. Those who adopt these views are bound to show that this is the state of things established in the New Testament. That it is not, appears plain from the very term 'pastors,' which imports both care and government; mild and affectionate government, indeed, but still government. Hence, the office of shepherd is applied to describe the government of God and the government of kings. It appears, too, from other titles given, not merely to apostles, but to the presbyters they ordained and placed over the Churches. They are called ἡγούμενοι, rulers; ἐπίσκοποι, overseers; προεστῶτες, those who preside. They are commended for 'ruling well;' and they are directed 'to charge,' 'to reprove,' 'to rebuke,' 'to watch,' 'to silence,' 'to put away.' The very 'account' they must give to God, in connexion with the discharge of these duties, shows that their office and responsibility was peculiar and personal, and much

greater than that of any private member of the Church, which it could not be if they were the passive agents only, in matters of doctrine and discipline, of the will of the whole. To the double duty of *feeding* and exercising the *oversight* of the flock, a special reward is also promised, when the '*chief Shepherd* shall appear'—a title of Christ, which shows, that as the pastoral office of feeding and ruling is exercised by Christ supremely, so it is exercised by his ministers, in both branches, subordinately. Finally, the exhortations to Christians to 'obey them that have the rule over them,' and to 'submit' to them, and 'to esteem them very highly for their work's sake,' and to 'remember them,' all show that the ministerial office is not one of mere agency, under the absolute direction of the votes of the collected Church." Vol. ii, pp. 593, 594.

With these sentiments the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church coincides. Part I, chap. iv, § 6, treats "Of the Examination of those who think they are moved by the Holy Ghost to preach." This section

ends as follows :—“ As long as these three marks concur in any one, we believe he is called of God to preach. These we receive as sufficient proof that he is moved by the Holy Ghost.”

Again, in the form of the Ordination of Deacons, the first question proposed to the elected candidate is, “ Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you the office of the ministry in the Church of Christ, to serve God for the promoting of his glory, and the edifying of his people ?”

The form of ordination in the Protestant Episcopal Church corresponds with that of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

In the form of Presbyterian Church government, agreed upon by the assembly of divines at Westminster, it is declared :—“ No man ought to take upon him the office of a minister of the word without a lawful calling ;” and in proof of this position, as well as to show what is meant by “ lawful calling,” reference is made to John iii, 27 ; Rom. x, 14, 15 ; Jer. xiv, 14 ; Heb. v, 4.

With the foregoing views the majority of Churches and theologians will be found to coincide. Nearly all will agree with us as to the *ground* of pastoral authority; but with respect to its *extent* there may be much latitude of opinion. This subject will be considered as we proceed.

CHAPTER II.

NATURE OF THE PASTORAL OFFICE.

1. Not temporal but spiritual—2. Not a priesthood, in the distinctive sense—3. An office of instruction and admonition—
Different degrees of pastoral authority.

1. *Not temporal, but spiritual.* As the pastorate is the chief human instrumentality employed by the gospel, it is evident that its design can be no other than the design of the gospel itself, viz.: the salvation of the world by faith in Jesus Christ. A less design is unworthy of the divine institution of the office; a greater end cannot be conceived by the intellect of an archangel.

As the human soul is the object of salvation, it follows that the aim of the gospel ministry is spiritual benefit. "We seek not yours, but you." The office of the pastor is, therefore, not temporal, but spiritual. It is true, that the law of Christ's gospel requires his people to be faithful in all things; to use the world as not abusing it, and to regard themselves, in respect to

the possession of worldly goods, as the stewards of a heavenly Master; yet the Scriptures nowhere recognise the pastor as clothed with temporal authority. To the civil magistrate is committed the power of the word, as "a terror to evil-doers;" and the apostles themselves, as well as private Christians, submitted "to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake." 1 Pet. ii, 13-15.

"When Christ saith his kingdom was not of this world, he implies, that he had a society that was governed by his laws in the world, yet distinct from all mundane societies. Had not our Saviour intended his Church to be a peculiar society, distinct from a commonwealth, it is hard to conceive why he should interdict the apostles the use of a civil coactive power; or why, instead of sending abroad apostles to preach the gospel, he did not employ the governors of commonwealths to enforce Christianity by laws and temporal edicts, and the several magistrates to empower several persons under them to preach the gospel in their several territories? And

can anything be more plain, by our Saviour's taking a contrary course, than that he intended a Church society to be distinct from civil, and the power belonging to it (as well as officers) to be of a different nature from that which is settled in a commonwealth."—*Stillingfleet on the Power of Excommunication.*

2. It is *not a priesthood*, in the distinctive sense of that term. There is a sense in which all Christian believers may be called "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," (1 Pet. ii, 5;) for they have been made "kings and priests unto God," (Rev. i, 6;) or, as some read, "a kingdom of priests." In reference to making atonement for sin, or mediating between God and man, the New Testament recognises but one priest, the great High-Priest of our profession, the Lord Jesus Christ, "who is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us."

"The Church of Rome, however, erro-

neously believe their priests to be empowered to offer up to the Divine Majesty real proper sacrifice, as were the priests under the Old Testament. Ecclesiastical history informs us that, in the second century, some time after the reign of the emperor Adrian, when the Jews, by the second destruction of Jerusalem, were bereaved of all hopes of the restoration of their government to its former lustre, the notion that the ministers of the Christian Church succeeded to the character and prerogatives of the Jewish priesthood was industriously propagated by the Christian doctors: and that, in consequence, the bishops claimed a rank and character similar to that of the Jewish high-priest; the presbyters to that of the priests: and the deacons to that of the Levites. One of the pernicious effects of this groundless comparison and pretension seems to have been, the introduction of the idea of a real sacrifice in the Christian Church, and of sacrificing priests.

“In the Church of England, the word *priest* is retained to denote the second or-

der in her hierarchy, but we believe with very different significations, according to the different opinions entertained of the Lord's Supper. Some few of her divines, of great learning and of undoubted Protestantism, maintain that the Lord's Supper is a *commemorative* and *eucharistical sacrifice*. These consider all who are authorized to administer that sacrament as in the strictest sense *priests*. Others hold the Lord's Supper to be a *feast* upon the *one* sacrifice once offered on the cross; and these too must consider themselves as clothed with some kind of priesthood. Great numbers, however, of the English clergy, perhaps the majority, agree with the Church of Scotland, in maintaining that the Lord's Supper is a rite of no other moral import than the mere commemoration of the death of Christ. These cannot consider themselves as *priests* in the rigid sense of the word, but only as *presbyters*, of which the word *priest* is a contraction, of the same import with *elder*."—*Rev. C. Buck.*

• The view of the sacrament of the Lord's

Supper held by the Methodist Episcopal Church, is that it is not only a commemorative rite; a sign, or an emblem of the sufferings of Christ; but also a covenant seal, or pledge of our allegiance to the Saviour; "insomuch that, to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ;" only, however, "after a heavenly and spiritual manner." Yet this view embodies nothing of the idea of a sacrifice or of the sacrificing priesthood.

3. The pastorate is simply an ecclesiastical *office of instruction and admonition*, to which is added, the authority to administer the sacraments, and to exercise an oversight over that portion of the Church who may receive the individual claiming such authority as the minister of Christ.

"But what authority is this? Is it not the duty of us all who are able, to instruct, exhort, reprove one another? Yes, it is; and I would to God it were more gener-

ally practised. But yet every private Christian cannot do this with the authority of a bishop or a gospel minister. The instructions and exhortations of private Christians are acts of friendship and charity; and the obligation to do it, is that mutual concernment and sympathy which the members of the same body ought to have for each other: in gospel ministers, it is an act of authority, like the censures of a father, a magistrate, or a judge.

“We do not pretend, indeed, as St. Paul speaks, to ‘have dominion over your faith;’ to exercise a kind of sovereign authority to oblige you to believe anything merely because we say it; but yet our authority is such, that if in the exercise of our office we explain the articles of faith and rules of life to you, it lays an indispensable obligation upon you carefully to examine what we say, and not to reject it without plain and manifest evidence that what we teach you is not agreeable to the will of God revealed in the Scriptures. For when we come in the name and authority of Christ, that man who rejects our message,

without being sure that we exceed our commission, rejects the authority by which we act; and ‘he that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God.’”—*Rev. W. Sherlock, D. D.*

To “preach the word,” being “instant in season and out of season;” to “reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine; and by all reasonable and judicious methods to endeavour to lead men to Christ—is the chief work of the gospel minister. This work is ranked by the apostle Paul above sacramental ordinances, (1 Cori, 14–17,) inasmuch as it hath pleased God “by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” To the ministry hath God committed the “word of reconciliation;” and they “are ambassadors of God,” beseeching men to “be reconciled to God.”

It may be objected, by some of our brethren in the Methodist Episcopal Church, (to whom, more especially, this treatise is addressed,) that our Church economy recognises the authority of men to preach the gospel who have yet no

pastoral powers, in respect to the government or oversight of the Church. To this we may reply, that our local brethren (and probationers in the itinerancy) are, in every essential respect, the coadjutors and assistants of the itinerant pastors of the Church, in the duty of instruction and exhortation; and they have never yet claimed the right of pastoral oversight and discipline.

It is not essential to the integrity of the pastoral office, that each individual should be clothed with its fullest and highest powers. In the apostles' days, the deacons were ministers, or preachers of the word; (Acts vi, 5, 10; vii; viii, 5, 12, 40;) yet it is evident that they were subordinate, or inferior, in pastoral authority, to the apostles themselves. In the economy of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the pastoral work is distributed among the entire ministry, both itinerant and local; but the measure of pastoral authority, inherent in each individual, is subject to variation. While the disciplinary oversight of the whole Church is restricted to the itinerant

ministry, who form a common pastorate in their conference capacity, the individual exercise of the pastoral office, in any particular part of the Church, may be committed one year to those who the following year may be placed in a subordinate relation, as assistants to the preacher in charge. Nay, the principle is now pretty well conceded—at least in the northern branch of the Methodist Episcopal Church—that the bishops, in whom centre the highest powers of the pastorate, being but the officers of the common or united pastorate, may either resign, or be removed to a subordinate position, if occasion may require, without affecting their character as Christian men, or their standing as gospel ministers. This principle seems to have been, in reality, the chief ground of the division of the Church, in the year 1844, and, by the acceptance of Bishop Hamline's resignation, by the General Conference of 1852, the question has, we trust, been finally settled.

CHAPTER III.

EXTENT OF THE PASTORAL OFFICE.

1. Public and private ministrations—2. Administration of the sacraments—Order of deacons a subordinate office in the pastorate—3. The oversight of the Church, including (1.) Admission and expulsion of members—(2.) The application of admonition, rebuke, and censure—(3.) The institution of prudential regulations and ceremonies, with consent of the Church.

WE have seen that the authority of the pastoral office, whatever it may be, is based upon the fact of a divine call to the individual exercising it; we now inquire what that authority is.

Since the New Testament, as the charter and rule of the Church, constitutes the pastoral office, and points out its design, we may reasonably suppose it to limit and define its extent; hence, whatever powers the pastors of any Church organization may exercise, which are not defined by, or to be clearly inferred from, the Scriptures, must be considered either a tyrannical usurpation of authority, or a conventional arrangement by the consent of the whole Church.

1. *Public and private ministrations*; in other words, preaching the gospel, both publicly and "from house to house," is the first and chief work of the Christian pastor. The language of the minister's commission is, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Mark xvi, 15. The apostle Paul regarded this work as of greater moment than any other duty he was called on to perform. 1 Cor. i, 14-21; Acts xx, 20, 21. See chapter second, section third.

Respecting the private ministrations of the pastors of the Church, the example of the apostles and first ministers of the Church, as given in the New Testament, is a sufficient authority and model. They kept back nothing that was profitable to the Churches, but taught them, not only publicly, but "from house to house," i. e., privately, on all suitable occasions. They never laid aside the dignity and sanctity of their ministerial character, but went forth *seeking* occasions of usefulness to their fellow-men. The salutations at the close of the apostolic epistles, show the

character of their intercourse with the families and individuals under their care. See also 1 Thess. ii, 4-13.

2. *The administration of the sacraments* of the Church also pertains to the pastoral office.

In the practice of the itinerancy of the Methodist Episcopal Church, it is true that persons are sometimes appointed to the exercise of the other powers of the pastorate, who have no authority from the Church to administer the sacraments, or but partial authority for that purpose, as in the case of probationers or licentiates in the itinerancy, or those who have only been admitted to deacons' orders, being placed in charge of Churches. To such cases, the remarks at the close of our last chapter will prove applicable.

It may be appropriate, in this place, to introduce a few remarks upon the office of deacon, in the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church, inasmuch as our Presbyterian brethren limit this office to the laity alone.

The appointment of deacons in the

first Christian Church, is recorded Acts vi, 1-6: "In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them." From this account it appears that the object of their first appointment was to assist or relieve the apostles in respect to the temporal

concerns of the Churches. Yet the solemnity of the mode of their appointment seems to imply that the office included something more than "to serve tables;" for they were constituted by the laying on of hands, as in the case of other ministers or pastors. Acts xiii, 2, 3. Accordingly, we find Stephen immediately preaching the word. Acts vi, 8-10. Philip also became eminent as a *preacher* of the word. Acts viii, 5-40. The apostle Paul, too, when giving instructions respecting the qualifications of the ministry, refers to deacons, as well as presbyters. 1 Tim. iii, 8-13.

As a subordinate office in the Christian ministry, we find deacons in every age of the Church. Tertullian tells us that they "baptized, in the absence of the bishop and presbyter," and both Polycarp and Ignatius speak of them as *ministers of the word of God*.

These arguments form, we think, sufficient authority for regarding the order of deacons as pertaining to the pastoral office, in a subordinate degree.

3. *The oversight of the Church.* This is the distinctive feature of the pastoral office, and requires, therefore, to be plainly stated and defended.

By the oversight of the Church we mean the reception of proper, and expulsion of improper members; the religious instruction and admonition of members; the application of ecclesiastical censures or rebukes to those who may have been guilty of improprieties; and the institution of such prudential regulations and ceremonies, with the consent of the Church, as may tend to edification.

(1.) As to the admission of proper, and the expulsion of improper members of the Church, the following passages of Scripture are applicable:—

“I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Matt. xvi, 19.

“Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever

ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Matt. xviii, 18.

"Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." John xx, 23.

The above texts mean *something*. It is contended by Protestants that none can forgive sins (in the moral sense) but God. What then can these passages mean, except *ecclesiastical authority*? That the apostles so understood their prerogatives is evidenced by their practice, as shown by the following texts:—

"I, verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a one to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." 1 Cor. v, 3-5.

This offender was afterward restored to the communion of the Church, by the

apostle's permission. See the next quotation.

“To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also: for if I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ.” 2 Cor. ii, 10.

“He that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit.” 1 Thess. iv, 8.

The propriety of restricting this part of pastoral oversight in the Methodist Episcopal Church to the itinerant ministry of that Church, is set in a clear light by Dr. Coke and Bishop Asbury, in their Notes upon the Discipline, written at the request of the General Conference, and published in 1798. They say of the preacher in charge: “He is also to receive members upon trial, and into the society, according to the form of the Discipline. If this authority were invested in the society, or any part of it, the great work of revival would soon be at an end. A very remarkable proof of this was given, several years ago, by a society in Europe. Many of the leading members of that society were ex-

ceedingly importunate to have the whole government of their society invested in a meeting composed of the principal preacher and a number of *lay elders* and *lay deacons*, as they termed them. At last, the preacher who had the oversight of the circuit was prevailed upon, through their incessant importunity, to comply with their request. He accordingly nominated all the *leaders* and *stewards* as lay elders and lay deacons, with the desired powers. But, alas! what was the consequence? The great revival which was then in that society and congregation was soon extinguished. Poor sinners, newly awakened, were flocking into the Church of God, as doves to their windows. But now the wisdom and prudence of *the new court* kept them at a distance till they had given full proof of their repentance. 'If their convictions be sincere,' said they, 'they will not withdraw themselves from the preaching of the word on account of our caution; they themselves will see the propriety of our conduct.' Thus, while the fervent preacher was one hour declaring the willingness of Christ

immediately to receive the returning sinners, the wisdom of the lay elders and deacons would, the next hour, reject them even from being received upon trial, unless they had been before *painted sepulchres, inwardly full of dead men's bones and rottenness*. The preacher who had the charge of the circuit nearly broke his heart, to see the precious souls which God had given him kept at a distance from him, and thrown back again upon the wide world, by *the prudent lay elders and deacons*. However, at his earnest entreaty, he was removed into another circuit by the Conference, under whose control he acted, to enjoy the blessings of *the Methodist economy*. The revival of the work of God was soon extinguished, and the society, from being one of the most lively, became one of the most languid in Europe.

“Glory be to God, *all* our societies, throughout the world, now (1778) amounting to upwards of one hundred and sixty thousand, have been raised, under grace, *by our ministers and preachers*. *They*, and *they only*, are their spiritual fathers,

under God, and none others can feel for them as *they* do. It is true, that in great revivals the spiritually halt, and blind, and lame, will press in crowds into the Church of God; and they are welcome to all that we can do for their invaluable souls, till they prove unfaithful to convincing or converting grace; and we will not throw back their souls upon the wicked world, whilst groaning under the burden of sin, because many on trial quench their convictions, or perhaps were hypocritical from the beginning. We would sooner go again into the highways and hedges, and form new societies, as at first, than we would give up a privilege so essential to the ministerial office, and to the revival of the work of God.

“‘The Master of the house [God] said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and *bring in hither* the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.’ He obeys his God without asking permission of any society

whether he should obey him or not. 'And the Lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and *compel them to come in*, that *my house* may be filled.' Luke xiv, 21-23. The servant answers not to his God, I will comply with thy command as far as my society, or my leaders or stewards, will permit me. Again: the Lord says to Ezekiel, chapter xxxiv, 2-10, 'Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds: Woe be to the shepherds of Israel. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, *neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost*. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd; and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As I live, saith the Lord God, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock be-

came meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock; therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord; thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock,' &c. Now what pastors, called and owned of God, would take upon themselves this awful responsibility, if others could refuse to their spiritual children the grand external privilege of the gospel, or admit among them the most improper persons, to mix with and corrupt them. Truly, whatever the pastors of other Churches may do, we trust that ours will never put themselves under so dreadful a bondage. It is in vain to say that others may be as tender and cautious as the *pastors*; for the *pastors* are the persons responsible to God, and therefore should by no means be thus fettered in their pastoral care. And those who are desirous to wrest out of the hands of ministers this important part of their duty, should rather go

out themselves to the highways and hedges, and preach the everlasting gospel, or be content with their present providential situation. Besides, the command of our Lord, 'Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, *baptizing* them,' &c., (Matt. xxviii, 19,) is addressed to *pastors only*—to his disciples, and, through them, to all his *ministering* servants, to the end of the world. But if ministers are to be the judges of the proper subjects of *baptism*, which is the grand initiatory ordinance into the visible Church, how much more should they have a right to determine whom they will take under *their own* care, or whom God has given them out of the world by the preaching of his word! For ministers to spend their strength, their tears, their prayers, their lives, for the salvation of souls, and to have both themselves and theirs under the control of those who never travailed in birth for them, and, therefore, can never feel for them as their spiritual parents do, is a burden we cannot bear. Thus it is evident that both reason and Scripture do, in the clearest manner, make

the privilege or power now under consideration essential to the gospel ministry."

(2.) As to the application of admonition, rebuke, and censure, it is, doubtless, included within the authority to which reference has just been made, as the greater includes the less; yet the following are cited as confirmatory proofs:—

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." 2 Thess. iii, 6.

"For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy-bodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well-doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." 2 Thess. iii, 11-14.

See also 2 Cor. x, 8-11 ; xiii, 2, 10 ; Rom. xvi, 17-19 ; 1 Cor. xvi, 16.

(3.) In reference to the institution of such prudential regulations and ceremonies as may tend to the edification of the Church, more objection may be urged. It may be said that this may open a door for innovation and abuse ; and this would be true did we claim for the pastors of the Church the prerogative of binding them upon the consciences of men, or even of establishing them, authoritatively, without the consent of the Church.

By prudential regulations and ceremonies we mean such Church arrangements and services which, however advisable, are not essential to the great design of the pastoral office, viz., the promulgation of the gospel of Christ.

“The right to preach the gospel, to administer its ordinances, and to enforce its moral discipline, is indeed claimed as of divine appointment ; but this does not imply the right to make those conventional regulations by which the divine statutes which impose duties common to

ministers and laymen, are to be carried into effect, in any particular Church. Those commands which are directed exclusively to ministers, and which, as they say, rest upon them with the force of moral obligations, they must fulfil according to their understanding of their meaning, and, therefore, according to regulations adopted by themselves. But whatever is common to all, may, without any violation of the divine injunction or authority, be provided for by the common consent, obtained in any way which may be deemed most expedient."—*Dr. Bond's Economy of Methodism.*

Whatever arrangements of this kind exist in the Methodist Episcopal Church, exist by the voluntary consent of each individual member of that Church, after having had six months' time in which to examine the doctrines, discipline, and practice of the Church. See Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, p. 30. The preachers of that Church, therefore, "cannot be charged with the assumption of a power which does not legitimately

belong to them," as it has been "virtually conceded to them by every one who has entered the connexion." The principal prudential regulations in the Methodist Episcopal Church, of the kind to which we refer, are class-meetings and love-feasts, to which may be added those checks and balances of power which so limit the administration of pastoral authority as to guard against abuse. See chapter iv.

CHAPTER IV.

LIMITATIONS OF THE PASTORAL OFFICE.

1. Right of membership to checks and balances of power—
2. Extent of such right—3. These principles applied to the economy of the Methodist Episcopal Church—(1.) As to the recognition of a divine call to the pastoral office—(2.) As to the facility of expelling unworthy ministers—(3.) As to the fitness of administering ecclesiastical censures.

IN our chapters on the nature and extent of the pastoral office, we have endeavoured, as accurately as possible, to define the bounds of its authority and mission. Reference has frequently been made, however, to certain prudential guards against human infirmity, or abuse of power, which limit the administration of the pastorate. These checks and balances of power will occupy the present chapter.

1. That the private members of the Church have a right to the institution of such prudential checks, will appear when we consider that the entire obedience of a Christian man to the law of the Scriptures is a voluntary obedience. It is true that human laws take cognizance of such im-

moralties as interfere with the rights and interests of others ; but obedience to God's law, as such, is a matter of conscience between man and his God alone. No bodily pains, or temporal disabilities, can enforce such laws. The execution of their penalties must be left to "the judgment-seat of Christ." Although the Church, as a society of believers, be constituted by divine authority, and its pastors have power, within such society, to "reprove, rebuke, exhort," to "put away," and to receive into fellowship, those who consent to their claims ; yet if a man refuse to consent to the Church's authority and control, there is no earthly authority for coercion recognised by the Scriptures of truth. If, therefore, communion with the Church, like submission to any other divine law, be wholly voluntary, the administration of the affairs of the Church should be regulated by the consent of its members, either expressed or implied. It does not follow that the will of the Church can set aside its divine constitution, as revealed in the Scriptures, since voluntary member-

ship in the Church is a recognition of the authority of that constitution; but the administration of Church authority, in accordance with the principles of the divine law, should be with the consent of the whole. Even pastoral teachings should be in accordance with some standard principles of doctrine consented to by the whole Church, or else the pastors become "lords over God's heritage," having "dominion over their faith;" or a looseness of opinion as to the meaning of the divine statutes is allowed, wholly inconsistent with the Church's mission as "the pillar and ground of the truth," and the beacon-light of the world.

2. The rights of the membership, therefore, require that they shall be permitted to recognise the divine call of each individual pastor; that every reasonable facility shall be afforded for the trial and expulsion of unworthy ministers; and that the membership themselves shall be permitted, in some way, to judge of the fitness of the cases to which Church censures, rebukes, &c., are to be applied.

3. It remains for us to show how these principles are applied, in the economy of the Methodist Episcopal Church. (1.) As to the right of the laity to recognise the divine call of the pastors of the Church. By reference to the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, page 38, it will be seen that no person can be licensed to preach, without a recommendation from the society of which he is a member, or of the leaders' meeting, which is composed of laymen, who are, in this case, regarded as the representatives of the society. The Quarterly Conference, also, which confers the license, is composed chiefly of laymen. Nor can any one be ordained deacon or elder, in the local connexion, or be admitted on trial in the travelling connexion, without a recommendation from the Quarterly Conference. All the Annual Conferences combined cannot license a man to preach, or appoint a pastor over any part of the Church, unless the laity have recognised his fitness to officiate as a minister of Christ.

This right of the laity does not militate

against the ministerial right to admit such recommended persons to the exercise of the ministerial office. A reference to the examples of the New Testament will show that while the membership of the Church should pronounce on the fitness of the candidate for the ministerial office, the power of ordination, or of appointment to that office, resides in the body of presbyters. In the selection of one to fill the vacant place of Judas, in the company of the apostles, (Acts i,) the disciples chose both Joseph and Matthias as suitable candidates, and the apostles themselves selected Matthias, who was numbered with the eleven. Again, (Acts vi,) in the appointment of deacons, at the suggestion of the apostles, the whole multitude decided upon the proper persons, who were ordained by the laying on of the apostles' hands. Timothy also was constituted a minister by the "laying on of the hands of the presbytery." 1 Tim. iv, 14. The Apostle Paul himself, although he began to preach straightway after his conversion, (Acts ix, 20,) was nevertheless set apart by the ministers of

God for the work to which the Holy Ghost had called him. Acts xiii. These passages imply that the mere selection or choice of the laity is not sufficient to constitute a minister of the gospel of Christ, though no one should be appointed to that work without their consent, unless, indeed, in cases of special emergency, as in the first calling of the apostles, or of the seventy, or in the preaching of the Apostle Paul, immediately after his conversion. Such an emergency, we conceive, prevailed in the case of the early Methodist preachers, and is a sufficient justification for the employment of lay-ministers by Mr. Wesley. Vital godliness being almost extinct in the land, God thrust out the early itinerant preachers to call sinners to repentance; and the Methodist Churches throughout the world are the result and the proofs of the divine authority of their mission. The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians: "Are ye not my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you; for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord;" and we may use

his language to the Methodist community, and say, "Truly the signs of an apostle are wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. For what is it wherein you are inferior to other Churches, except it be that your ministers are not burdensome to you?" See 2 Cor. xii, 12, 13.

(2.) Respecting the facility afforded in the economy of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the trial and expulsion of unworthy ministers, the Discipline provides, (page 91,) that an accusation of immorality may be investigated at any time, in the interval of the Annual Conference, by the presiding elder, in the absence of a bishop, with at least three travelling ministers. In the case of a local preacher, the preacher having charge of the circuit, with three or more local preachers, may proceed to an investigation, in the interval of the Quarterly Conference. The Annual or Quarterly Conference, however, as the case may be, finally consider and determine the case—local preachers being allowed the privilege of an appeal from the

Quarterly to the Annual Conference, and travelling preachers having an appeal from the Annual to the General Conference, if it be desired. The General Conference itself cannot do away with this privilege of trial by a committee, and of an appeal.

If a minister hold and disseminate false doctrine, or persist in the indulgence of improper tempers, words, or actions, the conference may expel him, as in the case of gross immorality. Or if a travelling minister is accused of being so unacceptable, inefficient, or secular, as to be no longer useful in his work, the conference may locate him, if it appear that the complaint is well founded.

In these provisions the utmost possible security is given for the preservation of the purity of the ministerial office, while the greatest possible care is taken to prevent an unjust accusation against the innocent, or a hasty condemnation. In addition to this, at each Annual Conference, the character of each travelling minister is considered and passed by a vote of the conference; and at such times, not only

is an opportunity afforded for any accusation to appear against a preacher's moral character, but the official or ministerial standing or usefulness of each member of the conference is a subject of free remark.

It will be observed, however, that the principle prevails throughout the Methodist economy, that a man should be tried by his peers. Thus the ministers of the Church can only be condemned or expelled by the consent of the pastorate. The propriety of this will be evident on a little reflection. Laymen cannot, in the nature of things, be judges of the circumstances and feelings of ministers, and must lack that nice discrimination of the moral fitness of things, in such circumstances, which is often necessary in order to judge of the guilt or innocence of an accused party. Besides, if Christ has committed to the pastors of the Church the power of admission and expulsion, and if they be constituted judges of the fitness of those who may be selected by the people as candidates for the ministerial office, it must pertain to their duty to judge of the fit-

ness of those who are retained in that office.

(3.) With regard to the fitness of the cases to which ecclesiastical censures, rebuke, &c., are to be applied, every reasonable provision is made to secure and preserve the rights of the membership. It is true, that while the economy of the Church was in a state of transition from the extraordinary mission of the early itinerant ministers to a more settled and definite order of things, the preacher was the sole judge of the propriety of executing the moral discipline of the Church; but even this was by the tacit consent of the entire body. Now, no one can be expelled from the Church, or be subject to Church censure, until a verdict of guilty be rendered against the accused by a committee of trial; and if such person complain that justice has not been done, he is allowed an appeal to the next Quarterly Conference. See Discipline pp. 98-102. In the Constitution of the General Conference, the highest ecclesiastical authority known in the Methodist Episcopal Church, it is provided

that they shall not "do away the privileges of our members of trial before the society, or by a committee, and of an appeal;" nor can this restriction be altered without the concurrence of three-fourths of all the members of the several annual conferences with two-thirds of the General Conference; a proceeding which would be tantamount to a revolution in the economy of the Church. See Discipline, pp. 32-34.

Cases, however, may arise, in which a society may become so corrupt, weak, or indifferent, that a majority of the members may do manifest injustice either by condemning an innocent person, or by screening the guilty from punishment. For such cases it is provided that if "the minister or preacher differ in judgment from the majority of the society, or of the select number, concerning the innocence or guilt of the accused person, the trial may be referred by the minister to the ensuing Quarterly Conference. As to any alleged injustice by the Quarterly Conference, however, there is no redress.

An accusation against a member may be investigated by the entire society or by a select number of them at the discretion of the minister. It may be objected that a preacher who is disposed to shield a guilty person may select such persons only to serve on the trial who are favourable to the accused ; but in a Church like this, where the ministry are dependant upon the popular sentiment of the laity both for their temporal support and usefulness, and where such facilities are afforded for a complaint to be made against a preacher's character and administration, such abuse of power is scarcely probable. Yet it might serve to destroy an objection if the selection of the committee of trial were provided for by special arrangement of the Discipline.

As it is, the government of the Methodist Episcopal Church exhibits the most admirably contrived system of checks and balances of power ever seen in an ecclesiastical community. While a divinely-instituted ministry is recognised, and allowed the exercise of its legitimate functions, the rights

of the membership of the Church are acknowledged and preserved. The Methodist people, on the one hand, while anxious to preserve a system which guards against human weakness, or the usurpation of power, have been ready to receive their ministers as the ambassadors of Christ; on the other hand, all that the Methodist itinerancy have ever asked and all that they desire as ministers of God is an untrammelled administration of the word of Christ in the pulpit, and such reasonable facilities for pastoral advice and instruction as are consistent with the itinerancy of their ministrations.

CHAPTER V.

PECULIARITIES OF THE PASTORAL OFFICE IN
THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

1. What Methodist episcopacy is—2. Such episcopacy similar to the apostolic form—Identity of presbyters and bishops in order—Yet a presiding office among presbyters is a primitive form—3. Such an episcopacy prevalent in ecclesiastical history—Testimony of Eutychius, Jerome, Clement, Polycarp, Ignatius, &c.—Admission of divines in the Anglican Church, &c.

WHILE the Methodist Episcopal Church recognises the divine right of ministers of other denominations of Christians, extending the hand of fraternal regard to all who approve themselves as the ministers of God, “by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,” (2 Cor. vi, 6, 7,) it has nevertheless some peculiarities in its economy respecting the ministerial office, which distinguish it from other Christian Churches. These are its episcopacy and its itinerancy.

I. Episcopacy. 1. On this subject the

Methodist Episcopal Church occupies the middle ground between Presbyterians and High-church Episcopalians, and agrees with the sentiments of many of the more moderate Episcopalian divines.

Methodist episcopacy is not regarded as a distinct order of ministers, intrinsically and of divine right superior to the body of presbyters, but is a delegated office springing from and responsible to the presbyters themselves.

Bishop Hedding, in his discourse on the Administration of Discipline, says: "Bishops in our Church are appointed by the elders in General Conference, and are held strictly amenable to that body." "They are the servants of the elders, to go out and execute their commands." Again, "When it is considered that the very men, to wit, the travelling preachers, over whom the bishop exercises his power, gave him that power; that they continue it in his hands; that they can reduce, limit, or transfer it into other hands whenever they see cause; there certainly can be no occasion for the vehement exclamations against

the bishop's power, which are frequently made by men of other Churches, and by a few misguided brethren of our own."

Bishops Coke and Asbury, in the Explanatory Notes on Discipline, say of the bishops: "They are *perfectly subject* to the General Conference;" again, "Their power, their usefulness, themselves, are entirely at the mercy of the General Conference."

In the Discipline, page 40, it is stated that a bishop is constituted by the election of the General Conference and the laying on of the hands of three bishops, or at least of one bishop and two elders; but if by death, expulsion, or otherwise, there be no bishop remaining in our Church, "the elders, or any three of them appointed by the General Conference for that purpose, shall ordain him according to our form of ordination;" thus proving that the power of ordination is an authority delegated to the bishops by the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

2. The episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church, thus constituted, is, we

think, nearer the apostolic form and practice, than in those Churches whose bishops are regarded as a distinct and superior order of ministers.

That presbyters (or elders) and bishops were identical in the apostles' days is seen by the manner in which the words are used by the sacred writers. In Acts xx, 17, 28, we read that the apostles sent from Miletus to Ephesus, "and called the elders (presbyters, *πρεσβυτέρους*,) of the Church," and when they were come he said to them, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, (bishops, *ἐπισκόπους*,) to feed the Church of God," &c. It is evident, therefore, that the apostle regarded the terms bishop and presbyter as synonymous, or expressive of the same order of ministers.

In the Epistle to Titus, chap. i, 5-7, the apostle declares that he left him in Crete to "set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain *elders* in every city; if any be blameless, &c., for a *bishop* must be blameless, as the steward of God," &c.;

clearly proving that a bishop and an elder were identical.

In the qualifications of the Christian ministry alluded to in the First Epistle to Timothy, chap. iii, the apostle speaks of bishops and deacons; and in the Epistle to the Philippians, St. Paul salutes them as "the saints in Christ Jesus with the bishops and deacons;" yet presbyters are acknowledged by all to have been a class of pastors which were general in the primitive Church, and their omission from these passages would be unaccountable on any other supposition than that they were identical with the order of bishops to whom reference was made.

That presbyters had something to do with the ordination of ministers is evident from 1 Tim. iv, 14: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." Again, the only account we have of any ordination in the case of the Apostle Paul himself, is in Acts xiii, 1-4, which shows that the ordination was at the hands of certain proph-

ets and teachers which were in the Church at Antioch.

Yet Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every Church which they founded, (Acts xiv, 23;) St. Paul was associated with the presbytery in the ordination of Timothy, (2 Tim. i, 6;) Titus was appointed to ordain elders in Crete, (Tit. i, 5;) and Timothy was directed to commit the gospel to faithful men who should be able to teach others, yet to lay hands suddenly on no man. 2 Tim ii, 2; 1 Tim. v, 22. These passages seem to indicate that although bishops and presbyters were identical in office and authority, a sort of superintendence was committed to some, to whom the work of ordaining ministers chiefly pertained—a state of things perfectly analogous to the episcopal office in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

3. Such an episcopacy has been acknowledged in the Christian Church from the earliest ages. *Eutychius*, the patriarch of Alexandria, in his *Origines Ecclesiæ Alexandrinæ*, affirms “that the twelve presbyters constituted by *Mark* upon the

vacancy of that see did choose out of their number one to be head over the rest, and the other eleven did lay their hands upon him, and blessed him, and made him patriarch." *Jerome* alludes to the same custom, and says that at Alexandria "the presbyters always elected one from among themselves, and having placed him in a higher rank, named him bishop." See *Stillingfleet's Irenicum*, p. 298.

Clement of Rome, A. D. 95, wrote his celebrated letter to the Corinthians, reproving them for having degraded certain presbyters from their bishopric. He uses the terms *presbyter* or *elder* and *bishop* as synonymous. He says, "The apostles, preaching through countries and cities, appointed the first-fruits of their labours to be bishops and deacons over such as should afterwards believe, having first proved them by the Spirit. Nor was this any new thing, seeing that long before it was written concerning bishops and deacons. For thus saith the Scripture in a certain place, 'I will appoint their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith.'

Isaiah lx, 17.” “Wherefore we cannot think that those may be justly thrown out of their ministry who were either appointed by them, (the apostles,) or afterward chosen by other eminent men with the consent of the whole Church, and who have with all lowliness and innocency ministered to the flock of Christ, in peace and without self-interest, and were for a long time commended by all. For it would be no small sin in us should we cast off those from their bishopric who holily and without blame fulfil the duties of it. Blessed are those presbyters who, having finished their course before these times, have obtained a fruitful and perfect dissolution; for they have no fear lest any one should turn them out of the place which is now appointed for them. But we see how you have put out some who lived respectably among you from the ministry, which by their innocence they had adorned.” “It is a shame, my beloved, yea, a very great shame, and unworthy of your Christian profession, to hear that the most firm and ancient Church of the Corinthians should

by one or two persons be led into a sedition against its presbyters." Again: "Who is there among you that is generous? who that is compassionate? who that has any charity? Let him say, if this sedition, if this contention, and these schisms, be upon my account, I am ready to depart; to go away whithersoever ye please; and do whatsoever ye shall command me: *only let the flock of Christ be in peace, with the elders that are set over it.*"

Thus Clement reproved both ministers and people. The duty to which he urges ministers in the last quotation he enforces by the examples of Moses (Exod. xxxii, 32) and of the princes of the Gentiles, but in all he uses the terms presbyter and bishop as synonymous, and acknowledges the elders as the rulers of the Church. Polycarp, the disciple of St. John, writes to the Philippians that they abstain from fleshly lusts, being subject to the presbyters and deacons as unto God and Christ." No mention is made of bishops as a distinct order.

Ignatius (A. D. 116) is the first writer

who notices a distinction between bishops and presbyters; but little reliance can be placed upon the writings which bear his name. Archbishop Wake, though persuaded of the genuineness of the epistles of Ignatius, says that there are considerable differences in the editions; the best for a long time extant containing fabrications, and the genuine being altered and corrupted. Yet the distinction made in his epistles is perfectly consistent with a delegated authority such as we have before alluded to. And that such was the case seems evident from his language respecting the presbyters. "Be ye subject to your presbyters, as to the apostles of Jesus Christ our hope."—*Epistle to the Trallians*. "Your presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles."—*Epistle to the Magnesians*. Cyprian of Carthage (A. D. 248) declares of the presbyters, that "in ministerial honour they were joined with the bishops."—*Stillington's Irenicum*, p. 377.

Jerome, in the fifth century, declares that "among the ancients presbyters and

bishops were the very same; but by little and little, that the plants of dissension might be plucked up, the whole concern was devolved upon an individual. As the presbyters, therefore, know that they are subjected, by the custom of the Church, to him who is set over them, so let the bishops know that they are greater than presbyters, more by custom than by any real appointment of Christ."

Testimonies of the same import may be given from Tertullian, Augustine, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Theodoret, &c.

Many of the best divines in the Anglican Church have admitted the right of presbyters to ordain, and their identity in order with bishops. Among them may be mentioned Archbishop Cranmer with others of the Reformation in the reign of Edward the Sixth, Lord King, Stillingfleet, Archbishop Usher, Whittaker, &c.

For further information of this kind reference may be made to "Stillingfleet's Irenicum," "Stevens's Church Polity," "Bangs's Original Church," "Lord King's Primitive Church," &c.

CHAPTER VI.

PEOULIARITIES OF THE PASTORAL OFFICE IN THE M. E. CHURCH—CONTINUED.

1. Scripture warrant for itinerancy—2. The polity growing out of it—(1.) The appointing power of the episcopacy—(2.) The presiding-elder system—(3.) The necessity of class-meetings.

II. ITINERANCY. 1. The itinerancy of the pastors of the Church is a peculiar and prominent feature of our Church polity. The fathers of the Church wisely regarded it as the keystone of the arch—essential to the completion and permanence of the whole—and found a warrant for it in the sacred Scriptures. They say: “The following portions of the word of God are pointed in support of the itinerant plan for the propagation of the gospel, *which plan renders most of the regulations of the General and Annual Conferences essential to the existence of our united society.*” [This italicising is our own.] ““These twelve [apostles] Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And *as ye go, preach,*

saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. And into *whatsoever city or town* ye shall enter, inquire,' &c. Matt. x, 5-11. 'Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into *the highways, and as many as ye shall find*, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into *the highways*,' &c. Matt. xxii, 8-10. 'Go ye, therefore, and *teach all nations*.' Matt. xxviii, 19. Be as extensively useful as possible. 'And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two, . . . and commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, *save a staff only* . . . And he said unto them, *In what place soever* ye enter into a house, there abide till ye *depart* from that place. . . . And *they went out* and preached that men should repent.' Mark vi, 7-12. 'After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face *into every city and place* whither he himself would come. . . . And into *whatsoever house* ye enter,' says our Lord to them,

‘first say, Peace be to this house. . . . And into *whatsoever city* ye enter, and they receive you, say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.’ Luke x, 1–9. ‘And the Lord said unto the servant, *Go out into the highways and hedges*, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.’ Luke xiv, 23. ‘They that were scattered abroad *went everywhere*, preaching the word.’ Acts viii, 4. ‘Philip . . . preached *in all the cities* till he came to Cæsarea.’ Acts viii, 40. ‘Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go *again* and visit our brethren *in every city* where we have preached the word of the Lord,’ &c. Acts xv, 36. *Timothy* and *Titus* were travelling bishops. In short, every candid person who is thoroughly acquainted with the New Testament must allow, that whatever excellences other plans may have, *this* is the primitive and apostolic plan. But we would by no means speak with disrespect of the faithful *located* ministers of any Church. We doubt not but, from the nature and circumstances of things, there must have been located min-

isters in the primitive Churches; and we must acknowledge, with gratitude to God, that the *located* brethren in our Church are truly useful, and of considerable consequence in their respective stations. But, on the other hand, we are so conscious of the vast importance of the *travelling plan* that we are determined, through the grace of God, to support it to the utmost of our power; nor will any plea which can possibly be urged, however plausible it may appear, or under whatever name proposed, induce us to make the least sacrifice in this respect; or, by the introduction of any novelty, to run the least hazard of wounding *that plan* which God has so wonderfully owned, and which is so perfectly consistent with the apostolic and primitive practice.”—*Notes to Discipline of 1796.*

2. The appointing power of the episcopacy, the presiding-elder system, and the necessity of class-meetings, arise from the itinerancy of the pastors of the Church, and are intimately connected with it. They must stand or fall together.

(1.) The appointing power of the episcopacy. If the essence of the ministerial commission is in the command to "*go into all the world,*" in opposition to waiting until called for by the people, it is evident that some plan of operations must be agreed upon by the ministers themselves, or each one will be left to move as seemeth best to himself; a state of things tending to confusion and irresponsibility, wholly subversive of the design of the institution of the Christian Church. The necessity of some plan or system is therefore obvious. What this plan should be, is, we think, a matter to be determined by the exigency of the case. It is a question of expediency and human judgment. This is the gist of the controversy on Church government which has agitated the various Christian communities in times past, and respecting which so much paper and erudition have been wasted. The prevalent opinion in the Methodist Episcopal Church is, that the mode in which the chief or governing power in a Church is to be exercised, is not authoritatively determined in Scrip-

ture; so that a Church may be either presbyterial, independent, or episcopal in its polity, as may seem most expedient; yet as itinerancy seems to have been the primitive and apostolic mode of propagating the gospel, so an episcopal form of government seems most expedient for carrying out the itinerant plan, according to its proper spirit and life.

Rev. A. Stevens, in his Essay on Church Polity, enters at large into the arguments in favour of the episcopal mode of appointing preachers to their respective fields of labour. He argues that it cannot be left to the preachers and people in common, because of the tendencies of human nature, which would cause the largest societies to choose the most popular men, and *vice versa*. Thus the less able preachers would be starved out, and the gifts of the ministry would not be distributed; besides, many societies and many preachers would be liable to choose the same place, and scenes of negotiation, strife, and disappointment, would be frequently witnessed in the societies, which would injure the

cause of the gospel. He also shows that a committee of preachers and laymen would not answer the proper end, as such a committee would not be disinterested, and would be composed of sectional men, who could not be acquainted with, and therefore could not judge of, the wants of the whole. Such a committee, too, would require a popular election in the conference, and electioneering, caucusing, &c., with all their attendant evils, would follow. Such a plan has been tried by some of those who have seceded from the Methodist Episcopal Church, and has proved abortive. "In view of these considerations," he says, "the Methodist Episcopal Church has chosen superintendents in whom to vest this power; men who have no local or selfish interest in it, but travel over the whole land, and are counselled and aided by the presiding elders, whose local inspection of the societies enables the superintendent to suit his appointments to their necessities. How could this power be better vested?"

(2.) The presiding-elder system arises

from the necessity of a local acquaintance with, or representation of, the various ministers and Churches, in order to provide the most suitable appointments. The great object to be obtained, in order to preserve the efficiency of the itinerancy, is the best local representation consistent with the most disinterested generalization on the part of the superintendents. This disinterested generalization is secured by restricting the superintendency to a few individuals, and by making it their duty to travel at large through the entire connexion. That they may have the best local knowledge of the wants of individual preachers and societies, the presiding-elder system has been devised. Whether it could not be improved, or so altered as to be more efficient, is a question which has been considerably mooted in various sections of the Church. No plan, however, has yet been offered, which, in the view of the writer of this treatise, would secure the object desired with fewer disadvantages than the present system.

If the number of bishops were augment-

ed, as has been urged by some, they must of necessity become more local in their views and feelings, to say nothing of the diversity of opinions and practice which would then prevail in the superintendency. If a committee of laymen from each charge should communicate with the bishop directly, their own interests would naturally be dearer to them than the general want, and the duties of the bishops, already onerous, would be heavier still. Perhaps more than half of such representatives would be dissatisfied and disappointed every year, be the presiding bishop ever so desirous to suit them all.

The chief objection to the office of presiding elder has been, the expense of maintaining a minister in a position where he has no regular pastoral charge; and it has been urged that he might attend to the duties of the pastorate in a separate charge while at the same time he receives the representations of the other Churches in his district and attends to the other duties of his office. The chief difficulties attending this plan are its impracticability and ine-

quality. No charge could be properly served while such extra duties were required; no district would be satisfied with such partial service; and such charge would naturally receive most attention in the council advising the appointments, so that the representation of the societies would be unequal.

It is not to be denied that in some parts of the Church the quarterly visits of the presiding elder and the quarterly conferences are less interesting than formerly, owing to the concentration of the work and the individualizing spirit of the age, and in such sections, half-yearly conferences might lessen the expense of the office referred to without much diminution of efficiency; yet there are large sections of the Church which find quarterly visitations none too frequent, and it is certainly most consistent with the genius of the gospel and of Methodism for the more concentrated and wealthy societies to aid in bearing the burden of those who are less favoured.

The presiding eldership is no sinecure. "They have a great and difficult work be-

fore them. They are required 'to take charge of all the elders and deacons, travelling and local preachers and exhorters' in their districts. They are to preside in the quarterly conferences. It is made their duty 'to take care that every part of our Discipline be enforced' in their district.

"By keeping a watchful eye over all the travelling and local preachers in the district, administering advice and admonition as occasion may require, a presiding elder may restrain irregularities in their early stages; correct small offences before they ripen into evils which would disgrace the Church, and injure the cause; and thereby prevent many of the charges and trials which otherwise would fall upon individuals, to their injury, if not their ultimate ruin.

"By an accurate knowledge of the gifts, grace, usefulness, and general character of all the travelling preachers under his care, the same officer may be prepared to give such a representation of them at the conference, as shall provide for a wise deter-

mination of the following points, to wit: Who shall be advanced in the ministry; who shall be set aside for want of talent or piety; and where each man shall be appointed. And with respect to the local preachers, a solemn obligation rests on the presiding elder to use his influence to encourage and help forward those of them who are pious and useful; but especially to arrest, restrain, or dismiss, according to Discipline, those who may be found otherwise. He should be well prepared to give an enlightened and true representation at the conference, of every man under his care who may be recommended for a travelling preacher, or for orders in the local ministry; that no one may be improperly put forward, through the influence or indifference of the presiding elder."

"This officer is to preside also in the trial of accused local preachers. And here he needs great wisdom, fortitude, and patience; to see that the laws of the Church be duly understood and regarded in those trials; that proper testimony, and none but such, be admitted in those investiga-

tions; and that suitable means be used to protect the innocent, and correct or punish the guilty, as the case may require.”—*Bishop Hedding on Discipline.*

(3.) The necessity of class-meetings also grows out of the itinerancy of the pastors of the Church. This necessity is clearly shown in the following extract from Dr. Bond’s *Economy of Methodism*: “To a Church under the direction of an itinerating ministry they are indispensable; for such a ministry could not, without the aid of this, or some similar institution, effectually execute the duties of a pastor. The limited term of a preacher’s appointment to any circuit or station renders it impossible for him to form an intimate personal acquaintance with the members of his charge, and hence he could not know whether they were walking as becometh the gospel,—whether they were individually growing in grace, or backsliding in heart from God. Without it no moral discipline could be enforced, no pastoral duties performed, or any unity of sentiment in doctrines preserved among the members

of the Church. Now, surely, that which is confessedly necessary to the promotion of piety, peace, and love—without which the spirituality of the Church would decay, and her communion be thrown open to those who have neither the fear of God before their eyes, nor his love in their hearts—cannot be without Scripture warrant. The propriety of such conditions of communion must be clearly inferable from the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, which the Church is bound to inculcate and enforce upon all her members.”

The class-leader, therefore, is the pastor's representative and counsellor, supplying to our Church organization the permanent advantages of a settled pastorate, without detracting from the efficiency and energy of the itinerancy.

CHAPTER VII.

PASTORAL CONFERENCES OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

1. The government of the Church essentially pastoral, though securing the rights of the laity—2. Powers of the Annual Conferences—3. Power of the General Conference—Its pastoral character argued from its origin and practice—Subject of lay delegation considered.

1. WE have seen that the lay members of the Church have a right to the establishment of such checks to the unlimited exercise of power as shall guard against undue ecclesiastical authority without subverting the spirit and design of the pastoral office, and that such a right extends to the recognition of a divine call to the ministry; to the privilege of proceeding, by accusation and trial, against unworthy ministers; and to a determination of the fitness of the cases in which Church censures, in respect to the laity, are to be applied. We have also shown that these principles are effectually recognized in the polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church. While acknowledging this right of its membership by its existing forms, the gov-

ernment of the Church is essentially pastoral government; and the conferences of ministers are for the regulation of ministerial duty chiefly, and are, in the proper sense of the term, *pastoral conferences*.

2. As to the annual conferences, composed of the itinerant ministers within the bounds of each, the Discipline of the Church makes it their duty to admit or continue on trial in the travelling connexion, or receive into full connexion with the conference, preachers who may be eligible to such positions, after such preachers have been licensed to preach and recommended to the itinerancy by the laity in the Quarterly Conferences. To them also is committed the election of ministers, either travelling or local, to deacons' or elders' orders; and jurisdiction over the Christian character and ministerial acceptability of the travelling ministers within their bounds, with the final jurisdiction of the cases of local preachers who may appeal from the judgment of the Quarterly Conference. In addition to this, a statistical account is taken of the state of the Church; the

amounts collected for the relief of superannuated preachers or their families, or to make up deficiencies of support, are distributed among the proper claimants; and the amounts contributed for the support of Missions, Sunday Schools, Tracts, and the American Bible Society, are recorded and forwarded to their destination. The stationing of the preachers is the work of the episcopacy, though performed at the time of holding the annual conference. Now in all this, it is not easy to see other than pastoral powers and duties. The annual conference does not constitute ministers, they are made such before they are admitted into the travelling connexion, nor can they be received there without a special recommendation from the membership. It is true, the conference has the power to judge whether they should be advanced in the ministry to the fuller powers of the pastorate, and when so advanced have entire jurisdiction over them; but this we have seen to be perfectly consistent with pastoral duty, the practice of the primitive Church, and the fitness of things. Ch. iv.

As to the distribution of the collections above referred to, it may be remarked, that such contributions are perfectly voluntary on the part of the donors, and are made with the understanding that they will be so distributed; and our people have too much confidence in the integrity and ability of their pastors, ever to cause them to withhold their offerings, or seek another mode of conveyance, lest there should be a temptation to a breach of trust.

The only additional prerogative of the Annual Conference (if we except occasional advisory or pastoral resolutions) is the election of delegates to the General Conference. As we shall endeavour to prove that this, likewise, is a pastoral conference, it will follow, from the argument, that the selection of those who compose it is a pastoral duty or work.

3. The General Conference, which meets every four years, is composed of the delegates of all the Annual Conferences. It has "full power to make rules and regulations for our Church," under certain limit-

ations and restrictions, which forbid any alteration or change in the articles of religion, or the establishment of any new standards or rules of doctrine contrary to those at present existing. This restriction is irrevocable by any power in the Church. In addition to this, they are restrained, also, so that without a two-thirds vote, and the concurrent recommendation of three-fourths of all the members of the several Annual Conferences, they cannot admit of more than one representative for every fourteen members of an Annual Conference, nor less than one for every thirty, provided each conference be allowed two delegates, and a delegate be allowed for the fraction of two-thirds the number fixed as the ratio of representation. They cannot (without the same concurrence) "do away episcopacy, or destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency;" nor "revoke or change the general rules of the united societies; nor do away the privileges of our preachers or members of a trial and appeal; nor appropriate the produce of the Book Concern, nor of the

Chartered Fund, to any purpose other than the travelling, supernumerary, and superannuated preachers, their wives, widows, and children.

“This conference, adjunct (but rarely) with the Annual Conferences, is supreme. Its supremacy is universal.” “‘Supreme’ means, that while acting within its constitutional limits, its decisions are final and all-controlling.”—*Mr. Hamline’s Speeches in the General Conference of 1844.*

“Discipline in our Church originates in the body of itinerant elders, who are all supposed to be present, by representation, in the General Conference, once in four years. That body not only makes ‘rules and regulations,’ but administers discipline, first on the bishops, and secondly on the Annual Conferences.” “I said the General Conference administers discipline on the Annual Conferences. The General Conference constitutes those bodies, fixes their bounds, and authorizes them to act as conferences; and, therefore, governs them.”—*Bishop Hedding on Discipline.*

Yet, notwithstanding the supremacy of

its authority, the power of the General Conference is strictly *pastoral*—originating by the consent and appointment of the body of itinerant ministers, and confined, in its legitimate sphere, to pastoral authority only.

The origin of the General Conference was by the appointment of the itinerant ministry, and was a concentration of power previously exercised by, and diffused among, the whole. The early Methodist preachers went to and fro, seeking those who were destitute of spiritual light, and wandering about as sheep having no shepherd; and their ministry was not in word only, but in power, in the Holy Ghost, and much assurance; and many people were added unto the Lord. Those who joined themselves to these holy men consented to receive the doctrines they had heard, and to be directed, in spiritual matters, by their pastoral guidance. In order to secure unity and efficiency in their work, these ministers met to *confer* with each other, (hence the word *conference*,) and the pastoral authority of each was shared among the

entire body. When these pastoral conferences became too numerous, and a tendency to localization became manifest, the plan of a delegated General Conference was conceived, and, until the division of the Church in 1844, preserved the unity of the body throughout the entire United States.

From this view it is evident that the General Conference can have no more authority than those from which it originated. Nor has it ever asserted more. Its administration thus far has, we think, been confined to its legitimate sphere—maintaining the moral discipline of the gospel, as the united pastors of the Church.

If the General Conference should attempt to ordain new articles of religious faith, or new terms of membership in the Church; or if that body should call in question the rights of the membership to which we have referred in chapter iv; or deny the right of petition to the laity,—resistance or secession, on the part of the membership, would be an indisputable right, and might be a duty. But no such

usurpation has ever been attempted or conceived of.

Now, if the authority of the General Conference be thus strictly *pastoral*, it ought certainly to be confined to those whom the Church has consented to receive as their divinely-commissioned pastors; and the desire of the laity (which has been expressed in some parts of the Church) to be admitted to a share in its counsels and authority, is a desire to assume the functions of the pastorate without sharing its toils, and without even the claim of a divine commission. The General Conference, by the adoption of the report of its Committee on Memorials, in reply to the petitions in favour of lay delegation, in 1828, says: "The great Head of the Church himself has imposed on us the duty of preaching the gospel, of administering its ordinances, and of maintaining its moral discipline among those over whom the Holy Ghost, in these respects, has made us overseers. Of these also—namely, of gospel doctrines, ordinances, and moral discipline—we do believe that the divinely-

instituted ministry are the divinely-authorized expounders; and that the duty of maintaining them in their purity, and of not permitting our ministrations, in these respects, to be authoritatively controlled by others, does rest upon us with the force of a moral obligation, in the due discharge of which our consciences are involved."

"On this point we beg, however, that no one may either misunderstand or misrepresent us. We neither claim nor seek to be 'lords over God's heritage.' We arrogate no authority to enact any laws of our own, either of moral or civil force. Our commission is to preach the gospel, and to enforce the moral discipline established by the one Lawgiver, by those spiritual powers vested in us, as subordinate pastors, who watch over souls as they that must give account to the chief Shepherd. We claim no strictly legislative powers, although we grant that the term 'legislature' and 'legislative' have been sometimes used even among ourselves. In a proper sense, however, they are not strictly applicable to our General Conference. A

mistake on this point has probably been the source of much erroneous reasoning, and of some consequent dissatisfaction. Did we claim any authority to enact laws to affect either life or limb, to touch the persons or to tax the property of our members, they ought unquestionably to be directly represented among us. But they know we do not. We certainly, then, exercise no civil legislation. As to the moral code, we are subject, equally with themselves, to one only Lord. We have no power to add to, to take from, to alter, or to modify a single item of his statutes. Whether laymen or ministers be the authorized expounders and administrators of those laws, we can confidently rely on the good Christian sense of the great body of our brethren to judge. These well know, also, that whatever expositions of them we apply to others, the same are applied equally to ourselves, and in some instances with peculiar strictness."

CHAPTER VIII.

ON PASTORAL SUPPORT.

Opinion of the secular press—The duty of supporting the ministry proved by Scripture—Ministerial support generally inadequate—A few reasons advanced.

It has generally been urged in answer to those who have objected to the extent of pastoral authority, that the people hold the purse-strings, and that this is a sufficient guarantee against tyranny and abuse of power—in other words, that the people in any particular Church may starve the pastor into perfect compliance with their will. Now it is certainly true that the support of the ministry in the Methodist Episcopal Church is a voluntary offering on the part of the people; and rightly so, as membership in the Church is voluntary; but this starving policy is contrary to the genius of the gospel, and would reduce the pastoral office to a mere puppet influenced by a few wealthy or influential persons, unless indeed the office were supplied by a continual succession of martyr-

spirits, or God should always call men who have independent fortunes to the exercise of its functions.

To preserve an independent, God-fearing ministry, it is necessary as far as possible to remove all temptation to obtain worldly advantage by pleasing men other than for their good to edification.

The following quotation from an article upon the position of the American clergy, which recently appeared in a secular newspaper in New-York, (The Home Journal,) shows that this subject is attracting the attention of those who are not especially identified with the Christian Church:—

“So far in our history, the preservation of civilization, amid the manifold tendencies to barbarism incident to the settlement of a new country, is due mainly to the labours of the clergy. At this moment there are vast regions in the western country where the sole hope and stay of civilization is the Methodist pioneer preacher; where the tidings that there is a better life than that of earth, nobler pleasures than those of sense, worthier aims than

worldly fortune, reach the ears of the people through him *alone*. But whether the clergy are destined to carry on to completion what they have begun, or whether the clerical profession is to become extinct, and a wholly different religious organization is to take its place, depends simply upon this—whether the pecuniary support of the American clergy shall or shall not be placed on a better, juster, and more independent footing than it now is. At present, as is well known, the tendencies all are to the extinction of the profession.

“There are three ways now practised in the Christian world of supporting the clergy. One is for the government, as in France, to pay the salaries out of the ordinary revenues, just as the civil officials are paid. Another is the English method of tithes and livings; the right of the clergyman to the tithe, or its commuted equivalent, being recognised and protected by the law, and the clergyman holding his living for life, or during ‘good behaviour.’ The third is the voluntary system, in which the pastor is the *hireling* of his flock; is ap-

pointed by his flock; holds his place at the pleasure of his flock, and is subject to all the whims and caprices of his flock—whom he must *please* or *leave*. Under all of these different systems, the clergy, as a class, have always been poor; and—to their honour be it said—have never, as a class, complained of their poverty. It is wages enough, they have always felt, to be occupied immediately in the affairs of the soul, and to be exempt from worldly distractions. Nor is it of their poverty that our clergymen are accustomed to complain—though they might well do so, Heaven knows! It is the *insecurity* of their position—their dependent, semi-pauperlike condition. They are aware, of course, that a man with an income of four hundred dollars a year, upon which a family, and perhaps an indispensable horse, are to be maintained, can preach with little effect to a man who exults in an income of ten thousand—particularly in these days, when money is the *only* thing to which *sincere* homage is paid. But if that annual pittance of four hundred dol-

lars were wholly, indisputably, and for life, *his own*, then the pastor, intrenching himself in the inherent dignity of his position, could safely defy his proud parishioner, and preach forth the words of truth and righteousness, without fear or favour. Can he do so now?"

The writer of the present treatise does not question the wisdom and advantage of the voluntary system, as it is called; yet he holds it to be the sacred duty of each member of the Church to contribute, in proportion to his means, for the support of the ministry *as such*, and that individual delinquencies are to be treated in the manner provided for by the entire Church; no individual member having the right to decide respecting such delinquencies—much less the right to punish a fancied or alleged grievance by “withholding the supplies.”

The following passages of Scripture set forth the duty of Christians to their pastors in a clear light:—“Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard and eateth not of the

fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that plougheth should plough in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power: but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things." 1 Cor. ix, 7-15. "Have I

committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely? I robbed other Churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man; for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied; and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome to you." 2 Cor. xi, 7-9.

"Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things." Gal. vi, 6.

"I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again: wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

Notwithstanding ye have well done that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now, ye Philippians, know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no Church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift; but I desire fruit that may abound to your account." Phil. iv, 10-17.

These passages show that while the first Christian ministers took the oversight of the flock of Christ "not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind," they also regarded it as the duty of the Churches to contribute to the temporal support of those who ministered in holy things—a duty which manifested the sincerity of their love for Christ.

Now, as the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church is a common pastorate—no one minister having superior powers to another, excepting such as may be given him by the voice of the whole body—it follows that the support of the ministry,

as far as possible, should be equalized throughout. The Discipline of the Church recognises this principle, by requiring collections, in each circuit or station, to be brought to each Annual Conference, for the purpose of relieving necessitous superannuated and supernumerary ministers, their widows and orphans; and for making up any deficiency in the allowance of the preachers; and by requiring that any surplus money remaining in the hands of the stewards of any circuit or station shall be appropriated in the same way.

Yet the support of the ministry among us is far from being equal, or generally ample. While a few (and but a few) of our largest stations contribute from eight hundred to a thousand dollars for the support of their pastor, a very large proportion of circuits and stations expect their ministers to maintain a family, and, perhaps, "an indispensable horse," upon three hundred and fifty or four hundred dollars; and, in many cases, it comes short of even this.

Such a state of things has been lamented

by many in the Church, and has been attributed to a variety of causes. The tendency to divide circuit appointments into small stations is one of those causes, and is, doubtless, a chief one. Rev. A. Stevens, in his Essay on Church Polity, thus refers to this subject:—"Many of these petty stations, especially in the eastern sections of our work, are too small to afford a comfortable subsistence to the preacher. Some of our conferences are groaning under the intolerable consequences, and yet proceed on, inexorably, in the very policy which has brought this calamitous state of things upon us—a policy which perplexes our annual appointments; absorbs, by a large per cent., an undue number of ministerial labourers; keeps these labourers on a stinted support, under which many of them are annually sinking with discouragement; supersedes, and has, indeed, nearly annihilated, in some places, the local ministry; is crippling many of our societies by prematurely insulating them, and thus burdening them with the expense of independent support, when

they are capable only of a combined one; a policy which, in fine, is adapted only to extinguish from our operations the great moral energies of the itinerancy, and spread through our work a sense of enfeeblement and discouragement." A remedy for this, we think, is found embodied in a resolution passed, two or three years ago, by the Philadelphia Annual Conference, respectfully requesting the bishops to make no new appointments within their bounds, unless a guarantee were given of their ability and willingness to support a married preacher, except in special cases.

Would it not be a relief to the episcopacy, and tend to strengthen the bands of the itinerant system, if the recommendation to form new appointments were left to a special committee of the conference?

Another cause of the inequality of support in our ministry may be found in the fact that a large proportion of our circuits and stations have abandoned, in practice, the old Methodist plan of weekly class collections for the more inefficient quarterly or monthly contributions. The in-

frequency of such collections weakens, in the minds of many, the force of the moral obligation to support the ministry, and is, we think, a source of a great part of the deficiency complained of so much in many parts of the work.

The above remarks have been penned with a view to call attention to the subject, rather than to propose a remedy, for which we feel ourselves insufficient. It seems evident, however, that whatever remedy be proposed, to be at all effectual, must be based upon the spirit and design of the itinerant system of propagating the gospel, and must resist the tendency to centralization now so lamentably prevalent. So long as Methodism retains its ancient landmarks, so long will it be the most effectual means of "spreading Scriptural holiness all over these lands."

THE END.

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